



March 8th, 2023

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of SB 1178

Dear Senator Kushner, Senator Cabrera, Representative Sanchez, Representative Wilson and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of SB 1178 An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days and urge you to ask that you support and pass HB 6859 An Act Concerning Predictable Scheduling, SB 1177 An Act Concerning One Fair Wage, SB 1180 An Act Concerning Rideshare And Delivery Driver Minimum Standards. March is Women's History month, we can only hope that you add to that and pass legislation which will positively impact and empower Black and Brown women. The impact of oppression, racism and sexism is not a study, it is real life.

It is very expensive to be poor in Connecticut. What does Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) mean in Connecticut? Does it mean that the poor have to work hard to remain oppressed? Or does it mean that we have to realize that not all of us exist equally and some of us have greater obstacles than others which have been ignored and underfunded for too long? Despite acknowledging itself to be one of the most 'progressive' states in America, Connecticut still has a lot of DEI work to do, in order to move past just 'checking the box' and not accepting that in order for DEI to be real and actual, we have to have policies, practices and accountability in place. Right now people who need health coverage do not have access to it due to old Federal Poverty Limited as well as old policies and procedures.

In a tale as old as slavery, Black and Brown people are carrying the brunt of the cost of living increases due to understated inflation, continual price rises, no rent stabilization, no rent capitation and no landlord accountability, increasing food and housing insecurity. Added to that, Black and Brown people generally have less access to resources and opportunities to assist them in improving their standard of living and wellness. Instead, many work long, hard hours for little incentive and even lesser health benefits. In truth, affording healthcare in Connecticut has become the equivalent to real estate, with those who are able to afford being able to take care of themselves, whereas the rest have to contend with the antique Federal Poverty Limits which cause them not to be eligible for assistance and increases hardship.

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone can afford to take time off from work to get better. Workers often find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place when they get sick: Stay home and lose a paycheck or the job entirely, or go to work and risk spreading an infection to others. According to a 2022 United States Census Bureau survey, 21% of all working adults missed at least one day of work between January 26th and February 7th due to Covid. Either they had Covid, were caring for someone with Covid, or had to stay home because their child's school or daycare was closed. Despite 1/5th of the country's workforce staying home sick during those two weeks, there was no mandated sick leave available for all workers. What was realized is that the United States is just one of 11 countries around the world lacking equitable paid sick and family leave programs and Connecticut can do things at the state level to change this.

Although employers must offer unpaid sick leave by federal law, paid sick leave is not guaranteed for all working people. Lowest-income workers, who are most dependent on regular paychecks, (such as the unheard workers who continually work to provide and support basic needs, domestic workers, restaurant employees,

hotel employees, gas station employees, fast food employees, delivery drivers) are the least likely to have paid sick leave. They are also the least likely to have their jobs protected if they do take any time off. But yet, Connecticut has prided itself on family-friendly policies. In 2011, Connecticut was the first in the nation to enact a statewide paid sick days policy. While groundbreaking at that time, today most workers are excluded from the program; 2022 data from the National Partnership for Women and Families shows that just 11% of our workforce is guaranteed the right to paid sick time under current law. How is that possible?

At the onset of the pandemic, short-term state laws and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act required most employers to provide their workers with up to two weeks of paid sick leave for specified Covid-related reasons, as well as 12 weeks at 2/3 pay for parents to care for children whose schools were closed. However, these measures were temporary, most laws expired late 2020 or early 2021. When the most important person in your life is sick, your whole world stops. But that should not mean your paycheck stops as well; how would you afford the care and post care when that happens or why would you bother to seek care at all? When a child is sick, too many Connecticut parents face an impossible choice: stay home to care for their child or go to work to cover their cost of living. Paid sick days allow employees to take time off from work while they are ill without losing pay. This is mutually beneficial for employers and employees, it enables sick employees to stay home and not infect others in the workplace, a choice employees might not make without paid sick leave.

Current Connecticut policy guarantees 40 hours, or 5 days, of paid sick time to workers if they (1) work for an employer of 50 or more employees, and (2) work for a job that falls under a lengthy definition of “service worker.” The law further requires workers to clock 680 hours at their job before using the time they have accrued. These conditions exclude workers who are new, part-time, balancing multiple jobs, working for smaller employers, or whose jobs do not fall under specific categories of “service worker.” These limitations especially disadvantage Black and Brown women, who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs least likely to provide paid sick days. These are reasons why SB 1178 must be passed if we plan to survive the current economy.

Paid sick leave is a critical racial and gender justice issue and the current law leaves too many people without paid sick days. We are asking you to support and pass SB 1178 An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days because it will cover all workers, reduce the wait period to use sick leave, increase the number of hours of paid sick time workers accrue and use per year from 40 to 80 hours and provide some protection against future pandemics. Connecticut’s children’s hospitals and clinics are overwhelmed by the surge in RSV cases while the number of people being hospitalized with influenza virus steadily increases. Yet, despite the desperate need for a stronger policy, and proof of its efficacy in supporting both our economy and healthcare system, Connecticut’s current paid sick day law pushes 89% of residents to go to work rather than seek care. Think about that the next time you pull up to grab a coffee or hear about those who spend so much time caring for others, and are able to do so little for themselves. With that in mind, we ask you to support and pass HB 6859 An Act Concerning Predictable Scheduling, SB 1177 An Act Concerning One Fair Wage, SB 1180 An Act Concerning Rideshare And Delivery Driver Minimum Standards.

In closing, as you listen to the testimonies being shared, we urge you to consider the viability of democracy when someone who does not speak English as a first language or needs communication support services such as sign language is only afforded 3 mins to share their testimony. Kindly acknowledge that access to healthcare includes being able to effectively and efficiently share thought, which will prove difficult if there is a lack of resources and time, both of which can feel like a cage to someone who is only trying to share their story. We appreciate the time, effort and courage which you put into your work to represent us, and are asking for you to consider how improving language and time access will increase our participation and support of your endeavors of improving our communities during the legislative process.

With appreciation,

Black and Brown United in Action